

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Ruth A. Wong
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Present:

Absent:

Commissioners

Commissioners

Hector Elizalde
Tess Banko
Brittanie Moore
Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Thomas O'Shaughnessy
Ruel Fuentecilla
Tom Lasser
Michael McDowell

Joe Leal

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Ruth Wong, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Secretary

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Hector Elizalde called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Brittanie Moore, 1st District.

Roll Call

There was a total of eight Commissioners at the meeting; quorum present.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Commissioner Michael McDowell to accept the Minutes for October 14, 2020 and seconded by Commissioner Ruel Fuentecilla. With one objection, motion passed.

Chairman's Report

Chair Hector Elizalde attended a heartwarming prayer assembly in Azusa to honor WW II veterans. He attended another religious service by the American Legion in the City of San Dimas and had an opportunity to talk about the Veterans Advisory Commission; he highly encourages the other members to engage in outreach.

Homelessness in San Gabriel Valley

Chair Hector Elizalde has an opportunity to attend the LAHSA Continuum of Care for the homeless community on October 20, 2020. LAHSA's program Operation Room Key (temporarily housing in various hotels) has now come to an end. The program has been revamped to "Home Key" – permanent transition to housing for veterans and families. LAHSA receives special funds for assistance with paperwork for veterans to apply. As the homeless population continues to grow, he encourages everyone to visit the LAHSA website where current information can be found. He reported another fire in the San Gabriel Valley that began when two homeless people had a confrontation over a heating system that turned over and caused the fire.

Commissioner Michael McDowell inquired about veterans who do not have identification; how long does it take to validate and how long does it take for the to receive services? Chair Hector Elizalde did not have an answer on the timeframe. He stated that Heidi Marston, Executive Director, LAHSA has a relationship with the DMV and is trying to expedite and secure proper identification and the same applies to Social Security. However, due to building closures as a result of COVID, it has greatly impacted these entities by making it difficult to move along quickly. Many people are not paying rent and now living in their vehicles; have never been in this situation before. Again, he recommends visiting the LAHSA website for further information.

Building and Tenant Update

Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy reported the following on Bob Hope Patriotic Hall:

For the month of December, Bob Hope Patriotic Hall remains closed due to COVID-19 protocols.

- Safe Parking – MVA continues to have conference call meetings every other Monday on the status of the Safe Parking program at the Bob Hope Patriotic Hall (Hall). The last call took place on Monday, November 30th where MVA was informed there are currently 3 participants in the program and 1 that is pending the completion of their intake form. There are presently no veterans enrolled in the program. Volunteers of America (VOA) (the organization that is providing the service) is still conducting more outreach to try and secure more participants with an emphasis on veterans. VOA has requested to have a solar powered charging station in the lot to give them access to electricity for charging cell phones, using a generator, power for the power wash, heating up breakfast items via microwave like burritos for participants in the morning, etc. MVA is currently trying to connect with the Sustainability section of ISD to determine the best location for the charger to be secured in the lot. The next meeting will take place on Monday, December 14th.
- The temperature in the electrical rooms at the Hall are currently too hot. ISD has been informed and service requests have been submitted to address the need to cool the room and replace the control board. The access doors to these rooms are positioned open with floor fans turned on in an effort to keep the rooms cool. Currently waiting on ISD's repair start date to address this issue.
- Some orders have been placed recently for necessary items in respect of the needs to reopen the Hall post COVID-19.
- All MVA staff and tenants have been informed that there is a new stay-at-home order due to the most recent surge in positive COVID-19 cases. The Hall remains closed to all staff, tenants, and the public with only the Director, Chuck, Deshawn, and Stephanie Guerrero to receive access on limited days to address necessary repair needs and MVA work access.
- On November 2nd during the time the Hall was used as an election location, a window in the library was noticed broken. ISD boarded up all windows and the front entrance from Figueroa Street. The Hall remains boarded up at this time to protect the facility from any further damage.
- The graffiti tagging to the top Northwest side of the Hall has been removed. Razor wire safety measures have been installed to prevent any further access to the roof.
- Mold remediation and ceiling repairs are now complete prior to entering the Purple Heart Inn dining room.
- ISD has come out to the Hall to access the mold in the flooring on the 4th floor. They are in the process of contacting a mold remediation company to address the mold issue. After the mold has been removed, new flooring estimates will then begin to assess the cost to put in new wood flooring to match the flooring in the breakroom on the 8th floor.
- There is mold in the basement behind the mural on the West wall. The County of Los Angeles Department of Arts and Culture submitted 3 options to choose on the removal of the mural, remediation of the mold, and fix the leak. MVA selected option 3 to retire the mural, remediate the mold, and fix the leak. The Department of Arts and Culture is currently checking to assess whether the mural has any material value.
- The carpet in the auditorium needs replacing.

- The projector screen fell and was damaged last year. It needs replacing.
- Security cameras are all working now.

Director Ruth Wong provided a briefing on the General Doolittle mural, stating that the first option is to restore it and the cost is estimated at 60-80 thousand dollars and it is not in the budget. The second option is to relocate it to another wall at Patriotic Hall, however, it is too large and does not fit. If it was possible, the electrical would need to be relocated, which would again, incur more costs to the department. Currently, waiting on Department of Arts and Culture for ideas of how to retire or relocate the mural.

Bylaws Update

Commissioner Tom Lasser stated that Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy did an excellent job on the revisions. He was instructed by the BOS and Director Ruth Wong to incorporate language from the Ordinance into the Bylaws and will complete the final review.

Strategic Plan Updates Goal 1

Objective 1 – Collaborate with the MVA to create awareness about VAC and the services provided from the MVA

Commissioner Tom Lasser made a checklist to promote and market services and resources for MVA; It is a simple draft and will need others to review. In addition, he suggested to create a packet for the department to include the calendar, commission information, department information. The packet is intended to be a hard copy to pass out at events and for networking which can be used to promote services.

Chair Hector Elizalde stated that it needs a timeline and inquired about utilizing the website and social media outlets to accomplish the efforts of marketing and promoting the hard copy documents.

Director Ruth Wong stated that she will connect Commissioner Lasser with Kathleen Piche, Public Information Officer (PIO) to streamline information with Internal Services Department. She recalls the packet of information and will work with Stephanie Guerrero to assemble a sample for him.

Commissioner Tom Lasser asked if MVA uses social media outlets as a form of communication because it would be very good to use various avenues to update the veteran community. Looking at next quarter as a timeline to complete. Commissioner Ruel Fuentecilla stated that he would like to be included and connected with the department's PIO to help with this effort.

Objective 2 – Establish Subcommittee to advise MVA on Tenant Agreements in Patriotic Hall

Commissioner O'Shaughnessy recommended that this be put on hold until 90 days after Patriotic Hall has opened to add any changes. However, we could include the report from the resumption special committee Chaired by Chief Deputy Stone with plans of 25 percent access per floor/working area, equivalent to three people. This plan is a breakdown of tenants that would operate on Mondays and Wednesdays or Tuesdays and Thursdays. The analysis would require the building to be reopened.

Objective 3 – Recognize individuals/organizations

Commissioner Michael McDowell had nothing to report at this time.

Objective 4 – Use Patriotic Hall to promote Military and Veterans Services

Commissioner Joe Leal was not present at the meeting. Chair Hector Elizalde asked if anyone has heard from him? Director Ruth Wong last seen him at the Veterans Day event with Supervisor Hilda Solis on November 11th.

Public Comments

Jacquelyn Flores, TELACU, Veterans Upward Bound stated that the program is funded by U.S. Department of Education. The program helps veterans pursue a higher education. Courses include Science, Math, Computer, and Rosetta Stone and are held online; flexible schedules with both morning and evening classes. The program also provides Academic Counseling, College Advisement, Financial Aid application assistance, GI Bill, and Work Study information. The new student orientation is January 15th classes begin on January 25th. The workshops provided are academic exploration,

learning study skills, education aid and scholarships, financial literacy and money management, career development, Linked In, CSU application assistance and Mental Health workshop. Upcoming event is Veterans Loteria Night on December 18 at 3pm, hosted by Cal Poly and prizes provided by JVS.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

- Veterans Peer Network Communication lead – DMVA Public Information Officer (PIO) will take the lead in this effort working with DMH communication consultant focusing on how to get the message out to veteran community and help with the recruitment of battle buddies and VPAN
- Hired two new Veteran Interns for Veteran Service Division – this year lost 5 staff, will put out Veterans Claims Assistant (VCA) I job bulletin and looking to fill a vacancy for VCA II
- Virtual Holiday event for DMVA staff and commissioners – December 15th at 12noon
- Change to VAC Ordinance – target January 2020 Board agenda; currently under review with County Counsel and will prepare a Board letter that will finalize the changes
- Establish Foundation for DMVA – target January 2020 Board agenda; solicit funds to enable new programs and completed Board letter that will go to County Counsel
- Explore call center application – looking at VA Wait While program; a demo was given to MVA to gain metrics of a better understanding of calls coming in
- New Board Supervisor – Holly Mitchell represents the 2nd District; Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas termed out and will serve on the City Council
- Special Request from the California State Commander Veterans Council – the request is for individuals to send letters to the Governor to allow CA veterans posts to reopen safely; will send out to all commissioners
- Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) – George Dixon, Veterans Services Supervisor will be working closely with Public Defender and Sheriff's Department on a referral process that would help us connect veterans in treatment courts (4 county and 1 federal); would help veterans in gaining benefits that he/she is entitled to

Chair Hector Elizalde took a moment to recognize and thank the Veterans Service Officer's for their hard work providing assistance and resources to veterans and families.

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- Prepared to report on behalf of the Ad Hoc Committee/Veterans Identifier – Tess Banko

Commissioner Fuentecilla created the Monthly Activity Report form that includes five sections for each commissioner to document/record their activity. There was a motion made by Commissioner Lasser to accept the Monthly Activity Report form and seconded by Commissioner McDowell. With no objections, motion passed.

Chair Hector Elizalde stated that the form is accepted as is with consideration of Commissioner O'Shaughnessy's recommendation of adding to the form later as we see fit. He thanked Commissioner Fuentecilla for taking the initiative to create the form.

Director Ruth Wong clarified that the Monthly Activity Report should be sent to Stephanie Guerrero, Administrative Support. She added that each year we need to submit an Annual Report to the Board of Supervisors and the form will be a tremendous help in gathering all the information.

Good of the Order

Vice Chair Tess Banko stated that there will be a Drive-thru Pantry on the VA campus on December 19; occurs monthly. There will be two additional pantries in January 2021. An upcoming event, the Hopeful for the Holidays webinar will cover developing and coping with the holidays during a challenging time. Looking for more ways on how to serve veterans and their families into this COVID era.

Commissioner Brittanie Moore stated that she and Commissioner Joe Leal attended two Veterans Day observations last month and honored local veterans in East Los Angeles and acknowledged heroes for their work in the community. General Ruth Wong was one of the honorees who gave remarks; she thanked her for her service to the county and veterans. Commissioner Moore also attended a food distribution in East Los Angeles held by the 1st District, in recognition of Veterans Day honoring multiple veterans. Supervisor Hilda Solis is now the Chair of the Board of Supervisors. Yesterday, the Board approved a motion authored by Supervisor Solis authorizing the LA County Department of Public Services to accept allocation of about 18 million dollars from the State towards Project Room Key. Knowing that many are impacted by the homelessness crisis, Supervisor Solis making it an essential goal to support veterans during this pandemic. Last, just a friendly reminder to reach out to our fellow veterans or deployed military personnel during the holidays. As always, she thanked everyone for what they do.

Commissioner Lasser attended several veteran's events on Zoom and will submit on Monthly Activity Report form after the meeting.

Commissioner Michael McDowell stated that he had nothing to add at this time.

Commissioner Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated that she sent a letter to the Governor regarding the reopening of the Post. She attended a food distribution and delivered food to the Pantry at the West Los Angeles VA, as well as delivered items for the VASH program. She also delivered items to the Domiciliary for the women veterans and will be delivering gifts for them. She and Commissioner Banko are working on a delivery for the homeless veteran population and will report back when she receives further information. Congressman Mark Takano realized that there was an oversight out of his office; a group called the Black Veteran Empowerment Council came together and are reviewing legislative material that will identify this oversight. She did not introduce guest speaker Alexia Lunningham, Chief of Voluntary Services because she had no knowledge about speaking at this meeting. In the past, the commission has recognized and welcomed newly incoming commissioners and would like to see this continued as there has been one assigned for the Second District. Chair Hector Elizalde thanked her for pointing that out and apologized for the oversight and will do so moving forward.

Commissioner Thom O'Shaughnessy suggested to invite Heidi Marsden as a guest speaker, not only as her position at LAHSA as Executive Director, but she is also serving Biden Harris's transition team for the VA. He announced that he has chosen to step down vacating one of the 3rd District positions from VAC after having served five years and three months. An email will follow immediately after the meeting to MVA's administrative team. He informed the commission that the 3rd District is aware of this personal action. Chair Hector Elizalde was taken by surprise and wished him all the best. His fellow Commissioners thanked him for his dedication to helping veterans and for the time he served on the commission. Commissioner O'Shaughnessy sent his best wishes to all.

Adjournment

In memory of Lieutenant Frank Hajime Watase and the men and women we lost at Pearl Harbor. We want to honor them now and forever.

A total of 19 participants were in attendance. Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero
Secretary
December 9, 2020